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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001298

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/25/2018
TAGS: PREL, KCIP, ENRG, EPET, PGOV, PTER, ASEC, SA
SUBJECT: CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION IN SAUDI
ARABIA: UPDATE FOLLOWING INITIAL ASSESSMENT

REF: RIYADH 01252

Classified By: Political Counselor Horacio Ureta for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (S) Summary: The USG's first assessment for Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oil facility was completed on August 19. It was a success in that it established the basis for our working relationship under the auspices of the Joint Commission on Infrastructure and Border Security Protection (CIP). Following the initial vulnerability assessment conducted at Abqaiq (Ref A), members of the assessment team provided Post's primary working-level Ministry of Interior (MOI) contact Dr. Khalid al-Ageel with several interim findings. Al-Ageel revealed details on some of MOI's uneasiness with Saudi Aramco's security practices, and he explained MOI's plan to ensure Saudi Aramco enacts the

recommendations that flow from vulnerability assessments conducted as part of the CIP program. End summary.

Saudi Review Process for Assessments

2. (S) On August 20, MOI's al-Ageel met Deputy Assistant Secretary of Energy William Bryan, members of the assessment team, and Econ Off informally to discuss the team's preliminary findings and to convey how the Saudi government wanted to handle the results. Al-Ageel asked the team to prepare an executive summary for Assistant Minister of Interior HRH Prince Muhammad bin Naif. Al-Ageel noted that Prince Muhammad bin Nayif and his aide, Dr. Sa'ad al-Jabri, expressed keen interest in the team's progress during the assessment. To ensure Saudi Aramco carried out all the recommendations of this and any other assessments, MOI's Higher Commission for Industrial Security (HCIS) would first review the final assessment report. Prince Muhammad, and possibly the Interior Minister HRH Prince Naif bin Abdulaziz, would approve the assessment and then forward the document to the Ministry of Petroleum and Minerals (MINPET). Al-Ageel did not want Saudi Aramco to have the chance to influence or to change the assessment conclusions during the approval process. After the two ministries approved the document, MINPET would inform the highest levels of Saudi Aramco, and MOI would advise the Facilities Security Force (FSF) commander. Al-Ageel said the official review process would take no more than two weeks. He added that neither MOI nor MINPET would argue about formal CIP recommendations, but if MINPET had a concern or objection, the matter might have to be decided by the king himself.

Continuing MOI-Saudi Aramco Friction

3. (S) Al-Ageel described how he was kept well-informed about Saudi Aramco's support to the first assessment team's work. Dammam-based MOI/HCIS officer Captain Adel al-Utaybi called al-Ageel when Eastern Region Aramco Security Director Samir Raslan placed limits on the level of cooperation from his subordinates. Al-Ageel received the same information from one of the team's primary Abqaiq counterparts, Adel al-Saad, who is Raslan's subordinate. Al-Ageel intended to report Raslan's unhelpful attitude to Prince Muhammad. (Note: MOI has a role in approving Saudi Aramco's selection of personnel for critical security posts, such as those at Abqaiq, and in this way al-Ageel says he retains his own, unilateral links to important security personnel in Aramco.)

4. (S) Beyond the bureaucratic problems, al-Ageel said Prince Muhammad was very concerned about the possibility of terrorists gathering details about the vulnerabilities of this and other critical facilities. He recalled how Saudi Aramco's President Abdullah Jum'ah was convinced terrorists

had detailed information about Abqaiq's critical nodes prior to the 2006 attack, when the attackers sought to sever the Shaybah-Abqaiq pipeline. Since the attack, Saudi Aramco has been under orders to report any problems at Abqaiq, however slight, to King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Sa'ud. This close attention to the plant means MOI is under intense pressure

RIYADH 00001298 002 OF 002

from the senior Saudi royals to improve security at the company's important facilities.

Provisional Assessment Highlights

5. (S) Representatives of the assessment team advised al-Ageel that the final analytical product would be complete in six to eight weeks (approximately mid-October). Including the two weeks al-Ageel said MOI and MINPET needed to gain Saudi government approval for the release of the report, the team estimated the report could be formally presented to the CIP Commission in late October. Al-Ageel told us this was a good time frame. The team reported Abqaiq security personnel had a good security culture, and after some initial Aramco-imposed restrictions, the assessment team had open and repeated access to all key parts of the plant. Al-Ageel asked about the new vehicle fence Saudi Aramco was building at the plant. After the team provided some positive remarks about the barrier, he mentioned that MOI did not like the way Saudi Aramco installed it without in-country testing and without MOI's approval. The team offered to provide new testing information on the vehicle barrier. (Note: Post will pass this to MOI for release to Saudi Aramco.) Notably, the team thought the FSF performed well during a test of response time for the detection of intruders approaching the facility's outer perimeter. FSF patrols outside the facility were active and their equipment appeared to be adequate. The security force's gate procedures also appeared sound, if unevenly enforced. The team noted the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) lacked armored vehicles and night vision equipment. The Abqaiq QRF consisted of two groups of 12 men from MOI's Special Security Force, although the Abqaiq unit was under the operational control of the FSF unit based at the plant; the team believed MOI should consider addressing this organizational anomaly by having FSF establish its own QRF.

6. (S) Comment: This is CIP's first success. The assessment provided useful information that, in the end, will help improve the security of Saudi Arabia's most critical oil facility. MOI officials are being candid about their concerns over Saudi Aramco's security procedures, and more importantly MOI is eager to hear and accept USG recommendations. The assessment also provided valuable information for our effort to improve the FSF as an integral part of CIP's mandate. We will continue to work with

al-Ageel and other MOI interlocutors to move this program forward. The next step is to establish appropriate dates for the first meeting of the CIP Commission here in Riyadh. End comment.

PAIGE

=====CABLE ENDS=====